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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Forty-sixth session
(Provisional Agenda item 4(k))

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

(Commission decision O (45))

Report by the Executive Secretary

1. This report has been prepared pursuant to paragraph 6 of decision O (45). It is in two parts; the first gives an account of measures taken by the Principal Subsidiary Bodies and other subsidiary bodies which have met since the resumed forty-fifth session. The second part gives an account of action taken by the secretariat to implement the various provisions of decision O (45).

PART I

Action taken by Principal Subsidiary Bodies and other subsidiary bodies

2. The following information relates to changes effected by bodies which have met since the adoption of decision O (45). The information is presented in summary form for easy reference, in the chronological order of the meetings.

GE.91-20974 /6577a

A. Committee on the Development of Trade
(3-5 December 1990, Report: ECE/TRADE/173)

Programme of work: The programme of work was shortened through the deletion of one previous sub-programme (dealing with obstacles) and a previous element (dealing with trade aspects of standardization and conformity assessment).

(a) Priority ranking: All elements in the programme of work were ranked in order (1 to 7).

(b) Resource question: The Committee was aware of the secretariat resources available for its activities.

Structures:

(a) Subsidiary bodies: No change.
(b) Officers: No change.

Terms of reference: No change, although the Committee may wish to consider this issue at its session in 1991.

Meetings schedule:

(a) Duration/periodicity: The session was shortened to 3 working days.
(b) Informal meetings: No change.

Reporting procedures:

(a) Length/content: The report was substantially shortened compared to previous practice.
(b) Adoption procedures: no rapporteurs were appointed.

Simplification of procedures: No change.

Problems encountered: The secretariat indicated that decisions would be taken regarding the transfer early in 1991 of posts and persons to UN/EDIFACT.

Review of publications: No action taken.

Requests for exemptions to O (45) provisions: None.

B. Working Party on Gas
(21-23 January 1991, Report: ENERGY/WP.3/1)

Programme of work:

(a) Priority ranking: An ad hoc group was set up for this purpose but was unable to decide on priority rankings for programme elements as a whole. It did so, however, within each "work area". The Working Party's Meetings of Experts were requested to consider priority ranking.

(b) Resource question: Indicative information on the allocation of resources was provided by the secretariat.

Structures:

(a) Subsidiary bodies: No change.
(b) Officers: No change.

Terms of reference: No change.

Meetings schedule:

(a) Duration/periodicity: No change.
(b) Informal meetings: One day of informal session was held.

Reporting procedures:

(a) Length/content Shortened version containing only decisions.
(b) Adoption procedures: Adopted at the end of the meeting but not in all languages.

Simplification of procedures: No change.

Problems encountered: Not able to reach agreement on restructuring of meetings of experts, and on setting priority ranking at programme element level.

Review of publications: No action taken.

Requests for exemptions to O (45) provisions: None.

C. Inland Transport Committee
(28 January-1 February 1991, Report: ECE/TRANS/85)

Programme of work:

(a) Priority ranking: Programme elements were ranked as high, medium or low priority
(b) Resource question: Indicative information on the allocation of resources was provided by the secretariat.

Structures:

(a) Subsidiary bodies: Two working parties have been merged.
(b) Officers: The bureau has been enlarged to include two vice-chairmen.

Terms of reference: No change.

Meetings schedule:

(a) Duration/periodicity: The number of meeting days has been reviewed; periodicity of some meetings has been extended.
(b) Informal meetings: Are convened as and when required.

Reporting procedures:

(a) Length/content: Volume of reports is being reduced.
(b) Adoption procedures: Possibility of change under consideration, e.g. no adoption of reports by meetings at the level of experts and below.

Simplification of procedures: No change.

Problems encountered: None.

Review of publications: No action taken.

Requests for exemptions to O (45) provisions: None.

D. Working Party on Electric Power
(4-6 February 1991, Report: ENERGY/WP.2/1)

Programme of work:

(a) Priority ranking: An ad hoc group was established but was unable to decide on priority ranking. The Working Party requested its meetings of experts to advise it on priorities.

(b) Resource question: Indicative information on the allocation of resources was provided by the secretariat.

Structures:

(a) Subsidiary bodies: Two meetings of experts were merged.
(b) Officers: No change.

Terms of reference: No change.

Meetings schedule:

(a) Duration/periodicity: No change.
(b) Informal meetings: One half-day informal session was held.

Reporting procedures:

(a) Length/content: Shortened version containing only decisions.
(b) Adoption procedures: Adopted the report at the end of the meeting in three languages.

Simplification of procedures: No change.

Problems encountered: Priority ranking (see above).

Review of publications: No action taken.

Requests for exemptions to O (45) provisions: None.

E. Working Party on Engineering Industries and Automation
(20-22 February 1991, Report: ECE/ENG.AUT/46)

Programme of work: The structure of the programme of work was revised and a new area of activity was added related to special issues in engineering industries and automation of relevance to economies in transition.

(a) Priority ranking: Programme elements were ranked as high, medium or low priority.
(b) Resource question: Indicative information on the allocation of resources was provided by the secretariat.

Structures:
(a) Subsidiary bodies: No change.
(b) Officers: No change.

Terms of reference: Revised terms of reference were drafted (see ECE/ENG.AUT/46, Annex III).

Meetings schedule:

(a) Duration/periodicity: In accordance with decision O (45) the next (twelfth) session of the Working Party will take place in 1993. Attempts will be made to organize the Meeting on Questions of Statistics in 1992 as a joint meeting with OECD.
(b) Informal meetings: No change.

Reporting procedures:

(a) Length/content: The report was reduced considerably from previous sessions (from 56 to 38 paragraphs).
(b) Adoption procedures: Reports of all meetings other than the sessions of the Working Party itself should be prepared by the secretariat on its own responsibility and not adopted by the meetings.

Simplification of procedures: The list of participants contained complete addresses, titles and telephone, telex and telefax numbers.

Problems encountered: In informal discussions delegations indicated that problems may arise in attracting experts to attend ad hoc meetings. In the past such meetings lasted two days - one day of substantive discussion and a half day for the adoption of the report. The spare time was used by experts to consult with one another and by the secretariat to obtain additional material and information. By reducing the duration of the meetings some experts may not be able to justify attendance.

Review of publications: The Working Party agreed to continue the issue of annual reviews of engineering industries and automation. To streamline the procedures for the preparation of the Annual Review, in future the secretariat will prepare the final version on the basis of guidance provided by the Meetings on Questions of Statistics. This procedure will eliminate the need for preparation of a draft of the Annual Review and will speed up its issue.

Requests for exemptions to O (45) provisions: None.

F. Senior Advisers to ECE Governments on Environmental and Water Problems (25 February - 1 March 1991, Report: ECE/ENVWA/18)

Programme of work:

(a) Priority ranking: The Senior Advisers prepared a preliminary list of priority projects in the programme of work (annex IV to the report) and requested the secretariat to circulate relevant comments by delegations, to be communicated by 31 May 1991 (para. 68(b) of the report).

(b) Resource question: Indicative information on the allocation of resources was provided by the secretariat.

Structures:

(a) Subsidiary bodies: No change.
(b) Officers: The question of enhancing the role of the bureau of the Senior Advisers will be considered at the next session (para. 52(c) of the report).

Terms of reference: No change.

Meetings schedule:

(a) Duration/periodicity: No change.
(b) Informal meetings: No change.

Reporting procedures:

(a) Length/content: While some delegations advocated a reduction in the length of the report, others insisted that their views be reflected.
(b) Adoption procedures: No change.

Simplification of procedures: No change.

Problems encountered: In discussing a list of priority for projects in the programme of work "a number of delegations stated that they were not authorized to endorse the preliminary list of priority at the fourth session" (see annex IV to the report).

Review of publications: No action taken.

Requests for exemptions to O (45) provisions: None.

G. Committee on Agricultural Problems
(4-7 March 1991, Report: ECE/AGRI/112)

Programme of work: The programme of work was substantially revised. The main areas of work agreed on were: economic analysis of the agri-food sector; relations between agriculture and the environment; standardization in the agri-food sector and quality developments; and statistics on food and agriculture.

(a) Priority ranking: Programme elements were ranked as high, medium or low priority.

(b) Resource question: Indicative information on the allocation of resources was provided by the secretariat. The Committee stated (para.16) that "the future presentation of the programme of work will contain ... the resources allocated ...". Since the Committee's subsidiary bodies have been charged to draw up proposals for their respective activities, a more precise indication of resource allocation can not be provided until this process has been completed and approved by the Committee.

Structures: The Committee proposed to change its title to "Committee on Agriculture".

(a) Subsidiary bodies: Two of the Committee's four subsidiary bodies remain basically unchanged so far as the scope of their activities is concerned (standardization and statistics). Two are replaced by new bodies (economic analysis, and the environment).
(b) Officers: The Committee increased the number of its Vice-Chairmen from one to two.

Terms of reference: No change.

Meetings schedule:

(a) Duration/periodicity: The Committee noted the relevant provisions of decision O (45) but recommended two exemptions (see below).
(b) Informal meetings: One half-day informal session was held.

Reporting procedures:

(a) Length/content: The report was greatly reduced from previous sessions (from 103 to 25 paragraphs).
(b) Adoption procedures: No change.

Simplification of procedures: Essentially unchanged. The practice of country statements prepared for each session will be continued.

Problems encountered: The absence of an agreed procedure for settling the time-table of the session beforehand created some problems with regard to providing advance notice to Conference Services on the sessions requiring interpretation facilities.

Review of publications: No action taken.

Requests for exemptions to O (45) provisions: The Committee recommended to the Commission an exemption from the rules governing the duration and frequency of meetings for its standardization activities, as follows:

(i) The Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce should meet every year in order to ensure a speedy procedure of adoption of new and revised standards to maintain co-ordination with the European Economic Community, OECD and Codex Alimentarius.

(ii) The Groups of Experts should have a minimum of 4 half days of meeting in order to ensure the participation of experts. Several delegations mentioned the difficulties involved in one-day meetings. The very specific terminology involved also makes it extremely difficult to conduct in-depth work without interpretation.

PART II

Action taken by the secretariat

3. In paragraph 4 III (a) of decision 0 (45) the Commission underlined the importance it attaches to the provision of additonal human and financial resources, within the current budget of the ECE, to strengthen the five priority sectors which it had defined. In the relevant provisions of paragraph 2 of the decision the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to draw these resources, first, from activities of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies in priority sectors which are identified as not being priorities in the work programme, and second from the lowest priority activities of Principal Susidiary Bodies which are not among the priority sectors, and from savings achieved by improving administrative activities and the organization of the ECE.

4. With that in view the Executive Secretary held intensive discussions with Division Directors in order to identify ways of redeploying posts from non-priority to priority activities both within and between Divisions. On the basis of those discussions and in conformity with paragraphs 2 I (b) (d); 2 II (d) (e) (g); 2 III (d) (i) (j); 2 IV (e); 2 V (e); 4 III (a), he has drawn up a revised staffing table and a redistribution of existing resources. Resources will in principle be redeployed as soon as possible. It is envisaged however that some redeployments will only become possible in the course of the budget biennium for 1992-1993.

5. The Executive Secretary made available to the Ad hoc Informal Session of the Commission on 5 March 1991 the staffing table of the ECE secretariat approved by the General Assembly in the framework of the ECE regular budget for the biennium 1990-1991 as well as the proposed revision contained in his submission to the Secretary-General for the ECE budget for the biennium 1992-1993. To assist him in the reassignment of staff to the posts redeployed to strengthen priority actvities, the Executive Secretary has set up an Advisory Group within the secretariat.

6. In conformity with paragraphs 2 I (e); 2 II (f); and 4 I (a) (ii) of decision 0 (45) the Executive Secretary has taken appropriate steps to initiate the process of harmonizing the approach among the secretariat Divisions to work within priority sectors which will at the same time encourage adequate exchanges of information among the Principal Subsidiary Bodies and a better co-ordination among Divisions of the secretariat and among Principal Subsidiary Bodies. Interdivisional teams will be set up to ensure better harmonization and co-ordination of activities which are of a cross-sectoral or interdisciplinary nature. To assure optimum use of limited staff resources, a system of time sharing (i.e. dividing staff time between programmes) and of flexible teams working on specific themes rather than bound within administrative sections has also been introduced. To assist him in this and related matters the Executive Secretary has established an advisory group on new methods of work within the secretariat. The Executive Secretary takes note that he is requested to prepare an annual report on co-ordination of the ECE's activities in the area of environment for consideration by the Commission.

7. Pursuant to paragraphs 2 I (f); 2 II (f); 2 III (g); 2 IV (d); 2 V (c); and 4 (a) (iii), the Executive Secretary has taken a series of steps to ensure co-operation and co-ordination of activities with other international economic organizations to ensure the optimum use of resources and expertise and to avoid duplication of work. A more detailed account of these measures is contained in document E/ECE/1229.

8. In accordance with paragraph 2 IV (d), the Executive Secretary submitted a draft proposal for interregional co-operation to the thirty-third session of the Working Party (12-15 March 1991) in document TRADE/WP.4/R.734. The Working Party adopted the following statement:

> "The Working Party recognizes that facilitation is a global objective requiring inter-regional co-operation, particularly with UNCTAD, and reaffirms its view that UN/EDIFACT is intended to have a global implementation requiring increased inter-regional co-operation. As it did in September 1990 (see para. 31 of TRADE/WP.4/173), WP.4 would once again remind the secretariat that staff and EDP resources required for the orderly development and maintenance of UN/EDIFACT, as specified in ECE Decision J (45), and as required to implement WP.4's agreed programme of work, should be acquired and implemented in accordance with the timetable specified in the annex to Decision J (45). The value of the objectives of the Interregional Project (TRADE/WP.4/R.734) is appreciated fully by WP.4. However, at this stage the possible implications of this project for the workload of WP.4 have not been assessed. Therefore, the Commission should consider carefully all possible implications of the Interregional Project on the WP.4 secretariat, and on the continued orderly development and maintenance of UN/EDIFACT."

9. In conformity with paragraph 2 V (j), a summary of the principal features of the Economic Survey of Europe 1990-1991 will be issued in time to be studied by delegations prior to the annual session of the Commission.

10. In conformity with paragraph 2 V (k), steps have been taken to ensure a periodic evaluation of the impact of various publications prepared by the Division for Economic Analysis and Projections on the broader public. An evaluation form for this purpose will be circulated with this year's edition of the Economic Survey of Europe, the Economic Bulletin for Europe and other publications.

11. In conformity with paragraph 3 (k), the Executive Secretary will report annually to the Commission on activities concerned with the transition process. His report to the forty-sixth session of the Commission is contained in document E/ECE/1232.

12. Pursuant to paragraph 4 I (d), the secretariat will make arrangements to circulate at meetings a more detailed list of participants with their complete addresses, fax numbers, etc., to facilitate distribution of national statements as appropriate prior to the meeting.

13. Pursuant to paragraph 4 I (e), the secretariat responsible for the drafting of meeting reports will to the extent that delegations permit limit them to the strictly necessary, confining the text mainly to decisions taken and a minimum explanatory text.

14. In conformity with paragraph 4 I (f) the secretariat will prepare a tabular presentation reflecting the volume of the reports of all bodies in the past four years which will be made available to the Sessional Committee at the annual session.

15. In conformity with paragraph 4 I (g) the secretariat will make available copies of the Guidelines to Principal Subsidiary Bodies contained in paragraphs 125-161 of document E/ECE/1150/Rev.1 mentioned above to the meetings of subsidiary bodies upon request.

16. Taking into account the provisions of paragraph 4 II on structures, the secretariat has made available to all delegations a revised calendar of ECE meetings for 1991 and a revised organigram of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies of the Commission and other subsidiary bodies. This organigram will be up-dated progressively during 1991 as the Principal Subsidiary Bodies meet and reach decisions on their structures. The Executive Secretary has set up an advisory group in the secretariat to assist him in the review of the Commission's programme of meetings, its structure and documentation.